

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

ARTHUR TABOR JACKSON,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 1:21-cv-268

v.

Honorable Paul L. Maloney

STATE OF MICHIGAN,

Defendant.

OPINION

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996) (PLRA), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A; 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must read Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff's allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, the Court will dismiss Plaintiff's complaint for failure to state a claim.

Discussion

I. **Factual allegations**

Plaintiff is presently detained at the Kent County Correctional Facility (KCCF).

Plaintiff sues the State of Michigan.

Plaintiff complains that he was convicted under unconstitutional statutes in multiple state courts over the past 18 years: in 2003 and 2009 in the Van Buren County Circuit Court; in 2010 in the Allegan and Berrien County Circuit Courts; in 2014 in the Chippewa County Circuit Court; and in 2020 in the Kent County Circuit Court. Plaintiff alleges that the unconstitutional convictions and incarceration caused him to suffer major psychological injury and mental and physical abuse. He alleges that he suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Plaintiff seeks to have his criminal record cleared of all charges and convictions. He also seeks \$25 million for the suffering he endured.

II. Failure to state a claim

A complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim if it fails ““to give the defendant fair notice of what the . . . claim is and the grounds upon which it rests.”” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (quoting *Conley v. Gibson*, 355 U.S. 41, 47 (1957)). While a complaint need not contain detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff’s allegations must include more than labels and conclusions. *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555; *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (“Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.”). The court must determine whether the complaint contains “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570. “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679. Although the plausibility standard is not equivalent to a ““probability requirement,’ . . . it asks for more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678 (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556). “[W]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged—but it has not ‘show[n]’—that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P.

8(a)(2)); *see also Hill v. Lappin*, 630 F.3d 468, 470–71 (6th Cir. 2010) (holding that the *Twombly/Iqbal* plausibility standard applies to dismissals of prisoner cases on initial review under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(i)).

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

III. Challenge to Constitutionality of Convictions

Plaintiff challenges his past convictions and incarcerations by the State of Michigan. None of those convictions appears to have been overturned, but he has been discharged from all of his sentences, with the exception of that flowing from the 2020 conviction, for which he remains on probation. *See* Mich. Dep’t of Corr. Offender Information & Tracking Service (OTIS), <https://mdocweb.state.mi.us/otis2/otis2profile.aspx?mdocNumber=437246> (visited July 21, 2021).

A challenge to the fact or duration of confinement should be brought as a petition for habeas corpus and is not the proper subject of a civil rights action brought pursuant to § 1983. *See Preiser v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 475, 484 (1973) (the essence of habeas corpus is an attack by a person in custody upon the legality of that custody and the traditional function of the writ is to secure release from illegal custody). Plaintiff’s sole federal basis for challenging any of his convictions or correcting his conviction record is by way of a habeas action, if one remains available to him. Therefore, to the extent that Plaintiff’s civil rights complaint challenges the fact

or duration of his incarceration, it must be dismissed. *See Adams v. Morris*, 90 F. App'x 856, 858 (6th Cir. 2004) (dismissal is appropriate where § 1983 action seeks equitable relief and challenges fact or duration of confinement); *see also Moore v. Pemberton*, 110 F.3d 22, 23–24 (7th Cir. 1997) (reasons for not construing a § 1983 action as one seeking habeas relief include (1) potential application of *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477 (1994), (2) differing defendants, (3) differing standards of § 1915(a)(3) and § 2253(c), (4) differing fee requirements, (5) potential application of second or successive petition doctrine or three-strikes rules of § 1915(g)).

Moreover, to the extent Plaintiff seeks injunctive, declaratory, and monetary relief for alleged violations of Constitutional rights, his claim is barred by *Heck*, 512 U.S. at 486–87, which held that, “in order to recover damages for allegedly unconstitutional conviction or imprisonment, *or for other harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid*, a § 1983 plaintiff must prove that the conviction or sentence has been [overturned].” *See Edwards v. Balisok*, 520 U.S. 641, 646 (1997) (emphasis in original). In *Heck*, the Supreme Court held that a state prisoner cannot make a cognizable claim under § 1983 for an allegedly unconstitutional conviction or for “harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid” unless a prisoner shows that the conviction or sentence has been “reversed on direct appeal, expunged by executive order, declared invalid by a state tribunal authorized to make such determination, or called into question by a federal court’s issuance of a writ of habeas corpus.” 512 U.S. at 486–87 (footnote omitted). The holding in *Heck* has been extended to actions seeking injunctive or declaratory relief. *See Edwards*, 520 U.S. at 646–48 (declaratory relief); *Clarke v. Stalder*, 154 F.3d 186, 189–90 (5th Cir. 1998) (claim for injunctive relief intertwined with request for damages); *Wilson v. Kinkela*, No. 97-4035, 1998 WL 246401, at *1 (6th Cir. May 5, 1998) (injunctive relief).

Plaintiff's claims for injunctive relief and damages all depend on findings that would render his convictions and sentences invalid. His claims, therefore, are barred under *Heck* until his criminal conviction has been invalidated.

A court's dismissal of a claim on the basis that it is barred by *Heck v. Humphrey* is properly considered a dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g) because it fails to state a claim on which relief can be granted. *See Hunt v. Michigan*, 482 F. App'x 20, 22 (6th Cir. 2012) (a claim barred by *Heck* is properly dismissed for failure to state a claim); *Morris v. Cason*, 102 F. App'x 902, 903 (6th Cir. 2004) (same). However, such a dismissal is without prejudice. *Sampson v. Garrett*, 917 F.3d 880, 882-83 (6th Cir. 2019) (citing *Taylor v. First Am. Bank-Wayne*, 973 F.2d 1284, 1289 (6th Cir. 1992)).

IV. Sovereign Immunity

Even were Plaintiff's claims not barred by *Heck*, he would not be entitled to relief against the State of Michigan in this civil rights action. Regardless of the form of relief requested, the states and their departments are immune under the Eleventh Amendment from suit in the federal courts, unless the state has waived immunity or Congress has expressly abrogated Eleventh Amendment immunity by statute. *See Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 98–101 (1984); *Alabama v. Pugh*, 438 U.S. 781, 782 (1978); *O'Hara v. Wigginton*, 24 F.3d 823, 826 (6th Cir. 1993). Congress has not expressly abrogated Eleventh Amendment immunity by statute, *Quern v. Jordan*, 440 U.S. 332, 341 (1979), and the State of Michigan has not consented to civil rights suits in federal court. *Abick v. Michigan*, 803 F.2d 874, 877 (6th Cir. 1986). Therefore, Plaintiff's claim against the State of Michigan is properly dismissed on grounds of immunity.

In addition, the State of Michigan is not a “person” who may be sued under § 1983 for money damages. *See Lapiés v. Bd. of Regents*, 535 U.S. 613, 617 (2002) (citing *Will v. Mich.*

Dep't of State Police, 491 U.S. 58, 66 (1989)); *Harrison*, 722 F.3d at 771. Therefore, Plaintiff's claim against the MDOC also is properly dismissed for failure to state a claim under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(iii), 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c).

Conclusion

Having conducted the review required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Court determines that Plaintiff's complaint will be dismissed for failure to state a claim, under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must next decide whether an appeal of this action would be in good faith within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997). For the same reasons the Court concludes that Plaintiff's claims are properly dismissed, the Court also concludes that any issue Plaintiff might raise on appeal would be frivolous. *Coppedge v. United States*, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962). Accordingly, the Court certifies that an appeal would not be taken in good faith.

This is a dismissal as described by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

A judgment consistent with this opinion will be entered.

Dated: July 28, 2021

/s/ Paul L. Maloney

Paul L. Maloney
United States District Judge